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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7662

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2020

TAGS: PTER PREL PGOV ASEC SN

SUBJECT: THE CHRISTMAS BOMBER: SINGAPORE CONNECTION

UNDETERMINED

Classified By: CDA Joel Ehrendreich for reasons 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) As reported in the press, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (the attempted Christmas Day bomber) was enrolled in language classes in Yemen beginning in August 2009, and his roommate while enrolled in the classes was 28-year old Singaporean Ahmad Hassan. While Post has no information specifically concerning Ahmad Hassan, sources have provided background information that indicates it is not unusual for Singaporean Muslims to study in Yemen due to historical ties.

2.(U) Up to several thousand Singaporeans are of Yemeni descent, including a former Minister of Environment. During the early 1800s, several hundred Yemenis from Yemen's southern Hadrami region settled in Singapore; most of the settlers were engaged in trade. Singapore's oldest mosque was founded by Yemenis, and the parliamentary district which Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo represents (Aljunied) was named for a prominent Yemeni settler. Yemeni settlers and their descendants form the bulk of Singapore's Arab community (total numbers unknown).

¶3. (C) Azri Aziz, Head of International Networking at Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS), the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore, told us that Yemen is a relatively popular destination for Singapore religious students, with around 50 Singaporeans studying in Yemen in any given year. Aziz said that approximately 150 Singaporean students go to the Middle East for formal religious studies each year, most of whom study in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria. The Middle East, and increasingly, Malaysia attracts such students because the students are able to pursue tertiary degrees in Islamic Studies. (Note: Singapore's madrassahs do not provide tertiary education. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Neither Azri nor our contacts at MFA were able to provide any information on the number of Singaporean students that go to the Middle East for language studies (as Singaporean Ahmad Hassan did), as opposed to religious studies. MFA Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa Deputy Director Stephen Lim said that unless the students were on government-provided scholarships, the GOS would not keep track of outgoing students.

¶5. (S) Agencies at Post are working with Singaporean counterparts to get more information on Hassan and/or possible Singaporean links to Yemen-based extremists. Any relevant information obtained will be reported septel.

EHRENDREICH

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